

In Memory of My Mentor Dr. Shiu Ying Hu

I came to know Dr. Hu through my mother, Hsia-Fei Wang Chang, who was a very close friend of Dr. Hu because both were alumnae of Gingling Women's College. My brothers and I fondly called her Aunt Hu. We visited her home in Brookline a number of times, and I was struck by how frugally she lived. However, when she hosted a dinner at her house for the Gingling alumnae, it was a sumptuous feast. We lived just a short walking distance from the Harvard Herbarium, where Dr. Hu worked. I was a frequent visitor to her office at the Herbarium from high school to college years at Harvard. She would show me the dried herbal specimens collected in thick books at the Herbarium. I was also very impressed by her ability to name all the live plants, from tall trees to little shrubs, around us when she took us on a tour of the Arnold Arboretum. Not only that, she also had a tremendous knowledge of the medicinal uses of many plants. Because of her I became interested in biology in college. For my senior year elective I decided to take a course on Ethnobotany with Dr. Richard Schultes (a colleague of Dr. Hu). Dr. Hu did not teach any course at the time, because she already was beyond the age of retirement, but she mentored me for my project, as it was on Chinese medicine, and she was instrumental in pointing me to the right resources. If I had not gotten into medical school I would have chosen graduate school in botany. To get in an American medical school as a foreign student at that time was very difficult. So I applied for US citizenship, and I remember celebrating on the day of swearing-in as a US citizen with Aunt Hu. On that day she treated me to a lunch at the Harvard Faculty Club, where I had my first taste of a sherry wine. I was amazed at the time how energetic she was in her 70's. I was further amazed that she went to Hong Kong and taught there for another 20 years.

I am forever indebted to her because of her kindness and generosity to me. She provided a shiny example of how to conduct one's life and work. I shall always cherish her in my mind.

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